



# Report

## The evolution of planning approaches: north Southwark 1971–1994

*Several different approaches to land use planning are distinguished in the typology of planning 'styles' produced by Brindley, Rydin and Stoker (1989). A distinct progression of such 'styles' may be seen in the experience of the last 25 years in north Southwark, which shows a progression from 'trend planning' in the 1970s, via 'popular planning' in the early 1980s, to a version of 'leverage planning' since 1987. Such a progression has implications for wider aspects of planning practice.*

### Introduction

Three distinct approaches to planning have been applied to the area of north Southwark in inner London in the last 25 years. By adapting the typology of planning styles of Brindley, Rydin and Stoker,<sup>1</sup> it is possible to identify a progression from a version of 'trend planning' in the 1970s, via 'popular planning' in the early 1980s, to a modified 'leverage planning' approach that has prevailed since 1987. This report explains the nature of these shifts in approach and suggests some broad conclusions for planning practice.

### 1971–1982—'trend planning'

The area of north Southwark, situated south of the Thames and opposite the City of London, faced a variety of problems in the early part of this period; these included a falling population caused in part by slum clearance policies and the decline of traditional industries. These factors were exacerbated by a boom in land values between 1963 and 1973, resulting in increased pressures for land speculation and property development.<sup>2</sup> Moreover, speculative redevelopment was facilitated by the land-use planning approach of the local authority, the London Borough of Southwark, whose 1971 'Strategy Plan for Southwark's Thames-side' proposed the re-zoning of much

of the area to 'West End Uses' in order to allow an additional 5 million square feet of office space to be developed. Despite local opposition, the Strategy Plan was approved in November 1973, resulting in further increases in land values and consequent redevelopment.<sup>3</sup>

### 1982–1987—'popular planning'

Local election results in 1982 reflected a significant degree of dissatisfaction by community groups in the borough who were opposed to the 'trend planning' approach. Consequently, the new planning committee mainly comprised new members, and the manifesto of the ruling Labour group of members incorporated a commitment to a community-oriented planning service and a participative approach, an evident reaction against the experience of the 1970s. Furthermore, the manifesto included a commitment to review the North Southwark Plan, which had reached the public inquiry stage. As a result, the Plan was abandoned, and officers were requested to produce a new plan that would reflect the priorities of the new council.<sup>4</sup>

Consequently, a new so-called 'Peoples' Plan' for north Southwark was produced. As a response to complaints of the impenetrable and inaccessible format of the original plan, the new plan was short, comprising a policy statement on the back of a

proposals plan. More significantly, the policies were unequivocal and restrictive, with none of the traditional loopholes that enable officers' discretion to prevail over policy intent. For instance, whilst the previous plan had stated that 'the council will not normally permit a change from any kind of industrial or commercial use to any other use', this statement had been qualified with a range of exceptions; by contrast, the new plan simply stated that 'change of use of industrial or commercial floorspace will not be permitted'.<sup>5</sup>

Whilst the participative method of preparation of the new plan was applauded by many observers,<sup>6</sup> the plan did not reflect the views of the property development industry. This proved to be significant at the Public Inquiry into the plan in September 1984, where the principal objector was the London Docklands Development Corporation (LDDC), since part of the LDDC's area fell within north Southwark. As Thornley indicates, the plan ran counter to the LDDC's strategy of stimulating the market by facilitating the development of offices and private housing.<sup>7</sup> The Inspector's report subsequently supported the LDDC, indicating that the plan was unbalanced since it sought to promote the interests of the local community at the expense of those of the private sector and the development industry.<sup>8</sup> However, the borough took the decision to proceed with adoption of the plan, which was called in by the Secretary of State in 1986. It was subsequently rejected and remains the only local plan for which such action has been taken.

A series of 'interim policies' for north Southwark was, therefore, put into effect to fill the consequent policy

vacuum, pending the completion of a new Unitary Development Plan for the borough. In the meantime, the area faced increasing pressure for development, and increasing financial restrictions in the form of rate-capping measures were being applied to the borough, making the implementation of council policies more difficult. Consequently, the need for effective partnership with the private sector was becoming increasingly urgent.

### **'Leverage planning'—1987–1994**

The abolition of the Greater London Council in March 1986 had indicated that 'local deviation from central government policy would have little chance of success'.<sup>9</sup> This, together with the result of the 1987 General Election, led to more pragmatic approaches to planning within many inner city local authorities. The need for a new approach within Southwark was highlighted in 1987 by the authority's 'Poverty Profile', which identified specific areas where multiple deprivation was particularly pronounced. Consequently, it recommended more effective co-ordination of service delivery and the application of a corporate strategy to target resource allocation to such areas.<sup>10</sup>

This approach was taken further in the borough's 'Land and Investment Strategy' introduced in 1989, which aimed at the co-ordination of council land and statutory planning powers in key areas in order to meet the council's objectives. The strategy drew on the results of the council's Poverty Profile regarding areas of greatest need and incorporated areas of opportunity where the council owned land and/or where private development could be facilitated. It was found that some 40 hectares of council-owned potential development land was available,<sup>11</sup> though the simple disposal of such land for a capital receipt was fraught with problems arising from government restrictions on the use of such receipts. The report introducing the strategy, therefore, warned that 'a major disposal programme would have a marginal effect on the ability to fund the (council's) capital program-

me, and the council's assets would be exhausted in a relatively short period'.<sup>12</sup>

The solution seemed to be to use the council's planning powers in conjunction with its ownership of land, in order to 'encourage the private sector to make more investment in the Borough in the locations and of the form most likely to benefit local people in greatest need'.<sup>13</sup> This was seen to involve providing appropriate infrastructure to enable land to be brought forward for development, producing statutory and non-statutory planning guidance to facilitate the assembly of development sites, entering joint ventures with the private sector using the council's assets and powers, and using planning agreements where appropriate.<sup>14</sup> Consequently, the strategy incorporated several 'flagship schemes' in areas where opportunities were available to take advantage of development pressure in order to meet local needs. Whilst it was recognized that a list of such areas would need to be updated, ten were initially suggested, each with a corporate project team comprising officers from all relevant council departments. The need for local consultation was highlighted, reflecting the previous emphasis on 'popular planning', and the corporate Chief Officers' Board was to retain overall co-ordination of the strategy, which was approved at the council's Policy Committee in March 1989.

The principle of partnership with the private sector was, therefore, established, and the 'flagship' schemes progressed with varying degrees of success in terms of financial gearing or 'leverage'—namely, the ratio of public-to-private sector investment within each area. The next step for the strategy was its incorporation into the council's Unitary Development Plan (UDP), which stated that, in specified 'Regeneration Areas', the council would welcome investment and encourage public/private sector partnerships,<sup>15</sup> and that, consequently, within such areas, 'planning permission will normally be granted for proposals which generate employment, improve the environment and meet the needs of priority groups'.<sup>16</sup> Three of

these areas were within north Southwark, where the contrast with the approach enshrined in the rejected North Southwark Plan is clear.

The broad approach of 'leverage planning' and partnership was echoed in the council's bid for City Challenge funding in 1992, since the bid document stated that the council 'strongly believes that public and private sectors must work closely together to bring about change and regeneration'.<sup>17</sup> The document cited as an example the Elephant and Castle Regeneration Area in north Southwark, where initial 'pump-priming' investment of £800 000 had attracted private investment of around £75 million.<sup>18</sup> Whilst the bid for City Challenge funding was unsuccessful, the partnership approach continued to be implemented. Consequently, a joint venture scheme between the council and a Swedish company to develop a part council-owned vacant site at the Elephant and Castle was completed in 1992, involving the development of a library for South Bank University, a hostel for the council's housing department and offices for the Department of Health. Furthermore, in the Bankside Regeneration Area, also in north Southwark, over £125 million of public and private sector resources were invested between 1989 and 1994. Similar partnership schemes were developed in other Regeneration Areas in the borough, and, in total, some £400 million of investment was attracted to such areas between 1989 and 1994.<sup>19</sup>

### **Conclusions**

There is, therefore, evidence of a clear progression of planning 'styles' in north Southwark between the early 1970s and the mid-1990s. Indeed, Brindley *et al* declare that 'no one style is uniquely identified with any one locality for any length of time',<sup>20</sup> and many observers have identified a general shift in prevailing planning 'styles' since the 1970s, broadly towards a mode of planning based on bargaining rather than regulation. In particular, similar shifts in approach can be identified in many inner-city local authorities in which a relatively

oppositional stance was supplanted after 1987 by a so-called 'new realist' approach. Such 'new' approaches involved an acceptance of the need to adapt to the entrenched position of central government by endorsing and facilitating the primary role of the private sector in regeneration initiatives, which usually implied an extension of public/private partnership and planning gain mechanisms as part of a 'leverage planning'-based approach.<sup>21</sup> This represents a significant divergence from the 'popular planning' style advocated by Nicholson, for instance, who contends that 'it is better to leave land vacant than have it developed for a use which is incompatible with need, or which prejudices the future'.<sup>22</sup> The retrenchment from the ambitious aims of 'popular planning' in Southwark would also appear to be due in part to the inherent limitations of such a planning style, in terms of the lack of community control over the resources necessary to ensure implementation of objectives for development.<sup>23</sup>

In addition, specific local political factors in inner London after 1987 necessitated a shift away from attempts to alter the policy of central government towards more specific objectives of increasing the effectiveness of service delivery, including the planning service. Hence, there was 'a shift from the esoteric and clientelistic concerns of the "new left" towards street-level service improvements'.<sup>24</sup> This shift clearly reinforced the perceived urgency of the need to extend the partnership or 'leverage planning' approaches, which appeared to provide a viable means of providing resources to meet local service needs. Such pressures were exacerbated by the publication of an Audit Commission report in 1987, which criticized the management of eight inner-London local authorities, including Southwark.

However, such approaches involve inherent dangers, including the potential predominance of a narrow range of land uses and the risk of corporatism whereby a lack of accountability and public consultation is seen as necessary in order to bring about private investment.<sup>25-27</sup> As Brindley and

Stoker suggest, 'the market-oriented approach to planning carries its own criteria of success'.<sup>28</sup> Hence, Colenutt indicates that the application of a partnership or 'leverage planning' style is likely to be on the developer's terms, and he contends that such an approach, involving the artificial creation of an encouraging climate for development, has been forced on many local authorities.<sup>29</sup> It would, therefore, seem to be inherently defensive in nature, making alliances with community groups very difficult to achieve. In aggregate, the application of such approaches may also involve more generalized dangers arising from the dominance of short-term objectives, with the consequent risk of increased market instability.<sup>30</sup>

Nevertheless, Thompson demonstrates the potential for a strategic, long-term approach to partnership by means of the use of public land and finance to promote appropriate private sector investment consistent with local needs.<sup>31</sup> This involves the development of local land strategies, an important element of the modified 'leverage planning' approach that was adopted in Southwark. The application of such land strategies may be extended, where feasible, by the use of public receipts acquired in this way to reinvest in appropriate land in order to facilitate further private sector development. In addition, of course, planning agreements can be used as an additional means of reconciling the demands of the property development market with the needs of the local community. The use of local land strategies in this way would, therefore, seem to minimize the problems, such as market instability, which may arise from a 'leverage planning' approach. They, therefore, represent a method by which local authorities can adopt a pro-active stance to planning in the face of decreasing control over the implementation of development and decreasing resources to meet local needs.

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<sup>1</sup>Brindley, T, Rydin, Y, and Stoker G *Re-making Planning* Unwin Hyman, London (1989)

<sup>2</sup>Ambrose and Colenutt, R *The Property Machine* Penguin, London (1975)

<sup>3</sup>*Ibid*

<sup>4</sup>Thompson, R and Williams, G 'Planning in Southwark' *The Planner/TCPSS Proceedings* 1988 (February) 92-95

<sup>5</sup>Newman, P 'New wave local plan on stage' *Planning* 1984 (4th May) 9

<sup>6</sup>*Ibid*

<sup>7</sup>Thornley, A *Urban Planning Under Thatcherism: The Challenge of the Market* Routledge, London (1991)

<sup>8</sup>*Op cit* Ref 4, 95

<sup>9</sup>Fainstein, S *The City Builders: Property, Politics and Planning in London and New York* Blackwell, Oxford (1994)

<sup>10</sup>LBS *Fair Shares? The Southwark Poverty Profile* LBS, London (1987)

<sup>11</sup>LBS *Land and Investment Strategy Report to Policy Committee of 20.3.89* LBS, London (1989)

<sup>12</sup>*Ibid* para 2.11

<sup>13</sup>*Ibid* para 3.4

<sup>14</sup>*Ibid*

<sup>15</sup>LBS *Southwark Unitary Development Plan (For Deposit)* LBS, London (1991a)

<sup>16</sup>*Ibid* 44

<sup>17</sup>LBS *Doing Business with Southwark: A Major Strategy in Partnership Regeneration* LBS City Challenge bid document LBS, London (1991b)

<sup>18</sup>*Ibid* 6

<sup>19</sup>Frankham, J 'Southwark perks up' *Municipal Journal* 1994 (9-15 September) 21-22

<sup>20</sup>*Op cit* Ref 1, 13

<sup>21</sup>*Op cit* Ref 7

<sup>22</sup>Nicholson, G 'Future Prospects' in Montgomery, J and Thornley, A (eds) *Radical Planning Initiatives: New Directions for Urban Planning in the 1990s* Gower, Aldershot (1990) 302

<sup>23</sup>Lansley, S, Goss, G and Wolmar, C *Councils in Conflict* Macmillan, London (1989)

<sup>24</sup>Hebbert, M 'Governing the Capital' in Thornley, A (ed) *The Crisis of London* Routledge, London (1992) 142

<sup>25</sup>Brindley, T and Stoker, G 'Partnership in inner city urban renewal—a critical analysis' *Local Government Policy Making* 1988 15 (2) 6

<sup>26</sup>Colenutt, B 'Politics, not partnership' in Montgomery, J and Thornley, A (eds) *Radical Planning Initiatives: New Directions for Urban Planning in the 1990s* Gower, Aldershot (1990) 312-320

<sup>27</sup>Reade, E *British Town and Country Planning* Open University Press, Milton Keynes (1987)

<sup>28</sup>*Op cit* Ref 25, 6

<sup>29</sup>*Op cit* Ref 26, 317

<sup>30</sup>*Op cit* Ref 1

<sup>31</sup>Thompson, R 'An achievable alternative for planning' in Montgomery, J and Thornley, A (eds) *Radical Planning Initiatives: New Directions for Urban Planning in the 1990s* Gower, Aldershot (1990) 273-285